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## II. IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS.<sup>1</sup>

After the excellent general introduction by Miss Shute, I need to give only a few special words by way of preface to the report on secondary schools.

First of all, I wish to thank between eighty and ninety New England teachers who have kindly taken the time and pains to answer the inquiries of list No. II so fully and satisfactorily. When we first set about this task some prophets of evil foretold that I should meet with disappointment in my inquiries among the secondary schools, and that my portion of the report would of necessity be theoretical and personal, rather than historical and critical. I confess that I, too, had misgivings, arising in part from a knowledge of the indifference with which a general public is wont to treat circular questions, and I scarcely hoped for half a hundred replies. But I find myself endowed with a veritable embarrassment of riches, consisting of answers from every state in New England, as follows: Maine, 7 reports representing 7 schools; New Hampshire, 9 reports representing 8 schools; Vermont, 2 reports representing two schools; Massachusetts, 22 reports representing 21 schools; Rhode Island, 8 reports representing 6 schools; Connecticut, 6 reports representing 6 schools.

To these I may add a personally solicited report of the Wadleigh High School of New York city—the largest in the world, I think, with an enrollment of about three thousand pupils. There are also, perhaps, a half dozen reports from persons whose names were not appended to their replies, and whose state is therefore uncertain—probably one of absent-mindedness. One of these is postmarked “Back Bay.”

I have said that there were 22 replies from Massachusetts. By this I mean the state at large. Besides, there were 32

<sup>1</sup> The list of questions is omitted, as each question is given in connection with its replies.

reports representing 24 schools in Greater Boston, 11 of these coming from 3 public and 3 private schools in Boston proper, not including Roxbury, Dorchester, Charlestown, and such suburban districts even within the city limits.

I note that some of the replies assume that we intend to report on a wider theme than your committee contemplated. We decided to confine our inquiries and suggestions to the somewhat humble but necessary theme of composition, leaving the subject of literature to another committee and a later date. Grammar and rhetoric also, as well as literature, are left out of our scheme of inquiry and recommendation, except where their roots interlace and absolute separation becomes impractical.

One teacher, in submitting a report, says: "One of my pet heresies is, that composition, *as such*, has no place in a high-school curriculum." But as we assume that most of you are orthodox we do not recommend its immediate abolition.

Our committee has held several meetings, and these have been characterized by harmony and substantial concord. Still, it is scarcely to be expected that our reports should agree in all particulars. In the first place, each member is alone responsible for the ideas advanced by him or her; in the second place, the fields traversed by each report are distinct, and need cultivation in peculiar and sometimes radically different ways. The general farmer, the market gardener, and the floriculturist all sow seeds, all sow them in soil, and usually find air, light, and water are helpful in developing the seed into a plant and in bringing the plant to maturity. But they may have different methods of dealing with the vegetable and animal enemies of their different plants, and may have different methods of coaxing and rearing their specialties, according as they are Indian corn, Hubbard squashes, or Lawson pinks.

Lest some members may have forgotten to bring their lists of questions, I will read each before submitting the report thereon. I will also premise that no question was intended to be a leading one, and that when alternative methods were suggested, an effort was made not to reveal the writer's own preference, if, indeed, he had one. It was farthest from his desire

to act like the prestidigitateur and cause his victim to draw a forced card. He has been impressed by the spirit of general interest and the evident frankness of the replies. He has been encouraged by such remarks as "Good idea ;" "Never have ; but I mean to ;" "I never thought of it : it seems a valuable suggestion," and the like. It is quite unimportant if some of those "good ideas" for which he was presumed to stand sponsor did not meet with his unqualified approval. Such remarks betoken interest and sympathy on the parts of the respondents, and it is only when we have a community of interests and a vital sympathy with each other's needs, that this association will be in the highest sense profitable. The first question upon list No. II is as follows : "During how many years is English taught as a specific subject?" Almost without exception English is taught specifically throughout the courses of all the schools heard from ; but their courses vary in length. They are 3, 4, 5, and in a few cases 6 years.

The second question is : (a) "On an average, how many recitation periods per week are devoted to the teaching of English?" (b) "What proportion of this (also on an average) is devoted to composition, and what proportion to literature?" The answers to the first part (the number of periods per week) present a wide variety ; 2, 2+, 2½, 3, 3½, 4, 4½, 5, and in extreme cases 10 and even 20. Possibly in the latter case reference was made to all recitations conducted in the *English language* ! The second part—the relative proportion of composition to literature—is answered,  $\frac{1}{8}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and  $\frac{3}{4}$  composition, the smaller fractions being more numerous. In many cases the amount of composition lessens as the course proceeds. This seems necessary in order to comply with the college requirements in English literature, but I think many colleges wish that the proportions were half and half.

The third question is, "How often do you have written work?" The replies are : "Daily ;" "Three to four times a week ;" "Every one or two days ;" "Two or three times a week ;" "Every Friday ;" "Irregularly ;" "Very often ;" "Once in two weeks ;" "Once in four weeks ;" "Always in composition classes ; in others once in six weeks."

Questions 4, 5, and 6 may well be considered together because of the extreme range of the answers. The latter sweeps through the whole diapason, chromatics and all. The questions are: (4) "About what proportion of the written work is done outside the class-room?" (5) "Of written work in the class-room, what proportion is impromptu?" (6) "Are your pupils often encouraged to write with the thought of a specific audience?" The extreme replies to 4 are: "Practically all;" "Almost none." To 5 they are: "Most of it;" "Very little." And to 6: "Rarely;" "Always."

Question No. 7 reads, "How is the written work of your pupils corrected?" The replies are full of suggestion and interest. There seems to be a fair unanimity of method, but by common consent it is not the best method. Almost no teachers make the mistake of actually correcting the errors and relieving the pupils of all thought; most of them indicate with colored ink or pencil the sort of error and the general location and leave the pupil to find the rest for himself. A favored few meet the student in personal conference. In addition to criticisms like the above by the teacher a fair per cent. of the schools have more or less of class criticism.

No. 8. "What are your views on the value or personal conference in the correction of compositions?" evoked replies more nearly unanimous than any other question on the list. Here are a few, and *ex pede Herculem*. "Absolutely essential to the highest success. Practically impossible because the number of pupils and hours of recitation." "Absolutely necessary. Next best thing, extended written criticism returned with the exercise." "The nearer instruction in composition comes to a personal conference on each theme, the nearer it approaches the ideal." "Theoretically, personal conference seems to me the only satisfactory solution of certain problems in secondary school English. Practically, 212 pupils and 28 recitations have hitherto precluded the possibility of my making any test." And so *ad finem*.

The answers to No. 9, "Is corrected work, as a rule, entirely re-written?" disclose a decided difference, not only of method

but of opinion. Many have their pupils rewrite all as a rule. Many have that which is below grade rewritten. Some forcibly object to the rewriting of corrected work on the ground that it is drudgery for the pupil. We may remark in passing, that if the pupil could be heard, he would sometimes call it drudgery to write the first draft.

No. 10 is, "Are the subjects for themes chosen mainly from literature or from experience?" Generally speaking there seems to be a fairly equal division between experience and literature. The majority seem to devote more time to experience at the beginning of the course and to literature toward the end. This is doubtless because of the approaching college examinations. A few schools have *no* themes chosen from experience. Happily, however, they are in a small minority. One teacher says: "We try to combine experience and literature as in 'Sir Rogerly de Coveley at a Polo Game.'" One or two others begin with literature and broaden to experience later. This seems rather like inverting natural processes. Just as fingers were made before forks, so experiences come before spelling-books.

I am a little surprised at the number of negative answers to No. 11 — "Do you often have compositions in the form of reports of recitations, debates, parties, concerts, sermons, or speeches?" Over a score give an unqualified "No." Others say "Hardly *often*;" "Seldom;" "Rarely;" "Sometimes;" "Occasionally." One teacher says: "We have not dared to touch on some of these, and the others have been lacking for our use." At first I was puzzled to see the meaning of this reply; but later reflection led me to conclude that the *Siège Perilous* in which no one dared sit was either at the sermon or at the party, and that the concert was lacking. But my question did not expect replies that reports were *regularly* made on *all* these subjects. Parties, concerts, sermons, etc., were given as specimens of entertainments or gatherings, some of which all students enjoy, or at least attend, and a proper account of which would be interesting to others who have not been present. Some practice in telling what one has seen — making others see through one's own

eyes—is good training. It is thus that journalists are made. In this way the imagination is cultivated, too, so that an expert reporter who was not at the Vanderbilt dinner with Prince Henry can write an account as edifying as if he had been a favored guest.

No. 12. “Do you often interchange compositions with the pupils of other schools for mutual criticism?” This question was answered by an almost universal “No.” Some seem a little irritated by the question. One writes: “The value of criticism by the class seems to me questionable. My own experience does not confirm the truth of the statement that a correction by a classmate has more effect than many by the teacher.” In reply to the last opinion I will say in passing that no such statement was expressed or implied in the question, and the framer of the question never heard the statement made categorically. But within a month a teacher of Greek has told him an interesting incident in this connection. He has repeatedly said to his class that if they would learn the principal parts of certain Greek verbs and the meaning of certain prepositions, they would be fitted to take the average Harvard examination in Attic Greek at sight. Day after day he repeated this opinion, but it seemed to gain small credence. At last one day a pupil nodded at the teacher’s trite remark. “Do you believe it?” asked the teacher triumphantly. “Yes,” said the boy; “I asked a fellow who had taken the examinations, and he said it was so.” Now, the teacher had had phenomenal success in fitting boys for Harvard for many years in many examinations; but the pupil refused to be convinced except on the testimony of one of his peers whose experience extended over but one examination.

Another reply to the question concerning exchange of compositions, reads: “No opportunity.” Another: “I never have. I wish the committee would tell of the methods and success of those who have.” I will briefly answer the last two correspondents.

All that is needed by way of opportunity is a teacher who is willing to co-operate and about ten cents in stamps. I have exchanged twice during the past term—once with a teacher in

the city, once with a teacher at some little distance. This was our method: On a given day, fixed two or three weeks in advance, our pupils wrote in the class for thirty-five minutes on the same topic without notes. For the previous two or three weeks, however, they had had opportunity to work up their theme if they wished. Both subjects were taken from literature, for especial reasons. One was very simple — “Mr. Burchell.” The other was rather difficult, and one that some colleges would not approve: “Child Influence as Exhibited in *The Princess* and in *Silas Marner*. The latter theme tested the power of comparison and the ability to think straight on the part of each pupil. The results justified the theory that some pupils in our high schools need not be confined to description, narration, and summary.

With the compositions (which were identified by numbers, not by names) each teacher sent his estimate of the probable order of excellence, judging from the past work of the pupils. Then the presumably best composition of one class was given to the presumably best writer of the other class for criticism. The critics then made both general and special criticisms. Special criticisms were written in the margins; general criticisms were written on separate sheets. Each pupil then marked his estimate of value on a scale from a A to F, and all papers were re-exchanged.

As to the success: (1), there was great interest manifested on both occasions, and my pupils emulated *Oliver Twist* in clamoring for more; (2) I was surprised at the discrimination shown by all classes in their general criticisms. It made me feel a becoming humility to think that I sat in daily judgment over boys who could point out so unerringly a bit of bad logic, a lack of coherence, a mass of mere verbiage, a digression, or a platitude. But I found a bit of consolation now and then when I detected them violating their own canons, as Richard Grant White so often does in his *Words and Their Uses*; (3) I have seen a marked improvement in some directions in which one class scored mine severely—that of punctuation especially. One incident of the exchanges interested me very much. I



gave one of the best and one of worst of a set of compositions received to one of the best critics in my class. He showed his discrimination by marking the former A and the latter E, and in the general criticism of the latter he hanged, drew, and quartered him, and then flayed him alive. The teacher wrote me that the victim wanted the critic's scalp, but he got something better. A month later I asked the teacher what the result of the merciless criticism had been upon his pupil. He replied earnestly: "Extend my thanks to No. 4. He has done in one criticism what I have vainly tried to accomplish in four years. He has stung that fellow's pride. He is actually trying to do something, and is succeeding. His penmanship has improved within a month so that it is hardly recognizable, and he is doing better in every way. The other teacher with whom I exchanged seems equally well pleased, and has proposed that another year we organize a syndicate of exchanges among those interested.

As to question 13—"Do you have spoken compositions"—the few affirmative replies betoken a lack of system. One of the best and most helpful runs as follows: "Yes, regularly in all classes. Four are appointed from each class each week to speak three minutes without notes on a subject of their own choosing. These are criticised by pupils and instructor. The instructor often reads from Higginson's *Hints on Speechmaking* and Brander Matthews's *Notes* on the same subject. No exercise interests the pupils more." I will add that I have pursued a method in many respects similar to that just given, and I find the talks furnish an excellent subject for ten-minute themes in the form of criticisms upon the speakers. I read the criticisms aloud, concealing the writer's name, and thus each speaker is stimulated to win the praise and avoid the censure of his comrades. I then correct the criticisms as I would any other composition.

No. 14: "Is careful attention given to the correction of spoken English." Here the ayes have it. Almost everybody says "Yes," and bold indeed were he who would cry "Hold! enough!" Yet I must agree with Miss Shute's ideas upon this same theme, and commend what she says to the consideration

of the secondary-school teacher. I have one unique reply, however, which may be of interest: "No. Our students whose English needs correction are in the minority. They soon become conscious of their errors and correct themselves. The result is usually all that could be desired. It seems to me that in view of these conditions, to correct in class a student's spoken English would be unkind to the student and unjust to the class."

No. 15: "Do teachers in the other departments co-operate with the English teacher?" Several say "Yes," but I am inclined to think the reply is to be taken in a Pickwickian sense. Other answers are evasive, as "Constantly urged to do so;" "Probably as much as in most schools;" "To some degree;" "Our principal encourages and requests it." Others are mildly sarcastic, as, "They mean to, but they forget it;" "We hope they will in time;" "All are expected to." And still others say bluntly: "Give very little help;" "Some do; I think that some do not;" "Inadequately and intermittently;" "They have been urged to, and appealed to in every way, but they respond only in a faint-hearted fashion;" "I am of the opinion that the English department is the only place where there is any attempt to teach English; I know poor English translations are accepted in Latin." And lastly: "No: on the contrary they are inclined to hold the English department responsible for all errors in English found in their work."

No. 16: "Are compositions often read before the class? If so, by pupil or by teacher?" I think there is but one unqualified "*No*"—implying, perhaps, that they are never read. Most teachers have them read with more or less frequency; some always by the pupils; some always by the teacher; while others try both methods.

Nos. 17, 18 and 19 were printed on the *verso* of the sheet and were unobserved by several, and consequently unanswered. Still a goodly number turned the leaf and took the trouble to reply.

No. 17 reads as follows: "Do you make a practice of taking a secret ballot to determine the best composition of several read before the class? If so, do you find the class opinion

generally coincides with your own?" I frankly confess that I expected a grand symphony of "Noes." I scarcely knew a teacher that practiced the ballot or favored it. Yet I believe it to be of the utmost value, if not carried to an extreme, both as a stimulus to the ambition of the writers on whom a class judgment will be passed, and as a training of the judgment of the individual voters. For the class usually votes right (*i.e.*, according to my judgment), and the voter who votes wrong writes himself down as uncritical—and no one knows it but himself. In both of the exchanges of which I have spoken, my class by a large majority selected the compositions of the other classes which the teachers of those classes said were probably the best. That was also, I consider, a great compliment to the judgment of each of those teachers, for I feel sure my class was right. One of their votes was most striking. The compositions of the rival class were separated into three parts, and after they were read before the class a vote was taken to determine the best in each division. In two out of the three cases the teacher's estimate was confirmed. In the other case, they disagreed, and here very possibly the class judgment was at fault. But when the three best according to their selection were read one after the other, the vote for the boy whose composition his teacher presumed was best, was almost unanimous.

Coming now to the replies to question 17, I find that, though the custom of balloting is by no means a common one, it is found in every state of New England with but one exception, and from that state I have received but two replies. The last fact in itself is significant. I read a few of the answers: "Not secret; no time. Classes generally find the best; always the worst. They can usually tell whether the writer is a boy or a girl. The name of the author is always concealed." "No. I mean to try. I fancy from the unwritten votes I see in their faces that I should find their opinion coincided with my own." (a) "Secret ballot when papers have been read by the writer; oral vote when the authorship is concealed." (b) "Nearly always." "Not as a practice. I have done so occasionally." (a) "I do frequently." (b) "Yes, almost invariably." (a)

"Often." (b) "Always, almost, though I try not to show my preference." So let the good work go on.

Nos. 18 and 19 are questions as perennial as Tennyson's brook, and were asked, not with the thought that the answers could be codified, but rather with the purpose of stimulating the thought of each member of this association so that after the report there might be a vigorous discussion. By way of summary I will give a few of my own convictions, and they may also pass as personal replies to Nos. 18 and 19, which read as follows: (18) "In what lines of English teaching in secondary schools do you think there is greatest need of improvement?"—To this I should reply, In the practice of composition (not the theory) and in the teaching of literature. (19) "Please state in less than one hundred words some of the ways in which such improvements may be effected."

I shall not limit myself to a hundred words, shall say nothing of the teaching of literature directly, and shall treat of both the theory and practice of composition in my closing thoughts. There is little time for arguments, so I shall confine myself mainly to conclusions, numbering them to correspond with the questions upon the list.

1. English composition should be taught throughout the secondary-school course.

2. This should occupy some part of at least three recitation periods of each week. The time devoted to composition, either spoken or written, should be equal to that devoted to literature.

3. There should be daily practice in the careful writing of English. When the specific English recitation does not occur each day, a translation into good English from some foreign language, a history test, or the like, will serve to keep the pupil in trim.

4. Until the pupil has learned how to compose, but little work should be assigned to be done outside the class-room. Some should be assigned, no doubt; just enough to avoid going to extremes.

5. Of work done in the class, the greater part in the early years should be work relative to the pupil's experience, or that

in which the material is furnished him. It should be work in which thoughts are not so much needed as words. Toward the close of the course, much writing should be absolutely impromptu—both as to thought and as to expression.

6. Pupils should always write expecting somebody to read and judge what they have written. It is well, for variety's sake, not to have the same audience in mind day after day. Novelty always enchains the interest of the child.

7. The impression should never prevail that work is not to be inspected or valued. There is not time to mark all themes that should be written; but all themes should be returned to the writer for careful preservation during the year, and at least one of every two or three should be carefully marked for revision. The writer should be encouraged to revise the others himself.

8. Personal conference should be secured, as all agree that that is the only perfect method.

9. Much of the corrected work should be entirely rewritten, but not all, except in certain years. By having frequent short themes, each may be rewritten if necessary, without imposing a seeming hardship upon the pupil.

10. Subjects for themes should not be chosen exclusively either from literature or from experience. The proportions should vary at different stages of the pupil's career. If possible, divide them about equally.

11. Reports of various sorts furnish valuable training. *Reporters* report constantly, and the twentieth century newspapers will need many reporters.

12. The interchange of compositions with writers in other schools gives a healthful and natural interest to composition.

13. Spoken compositions are no less valuable than written, and excite far more enthusiasm.

14. Spoken English should be corrected according to some system.

15. Every possible pressure—moral, physical, and political—should be brought to bear upon the teachers of all other departments to induce them to co-operate with the English teacher.

16. Compositions should be read frequently, even generally,

before the class; sometimes by the pupil, sometimes by the teacher. Class criticism should follow, and pupils should be taught that criticism means, not censure, but judgment.

17. The secret ballot, showing the class judgment of the best themes, should be employed much more widely, but not overdone. It is a valuable aid to the teacher and a valuable training for all the class. It teaches pupils to weigh and consider. It stimulates each writer to do his very best, knowing that his peers will dispense even-handed justice and give victory to whom victory is due, honor to whom honor.

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